

8 (6)
T H O U G H T S

ON THE

L A T E R I O T

AT

B I R M I N G H A M.

*Ipse mihi nuper Libycis tu testis in undis
Quam molem subito excierit.—*

VIRG. Æn. v. 790.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following performance is dictated by no party views nor intolerant spirit. A sincere love to his country, a desire to serve it, and an idea that some of the remarks here made were not beneath its attention, were the reasons that induced the Author to offer it to the Public. He has concealed his name, knowing that it is too obscure to add any thing to the circulation of his book, and to prevent his being suspected of writing from no other motive than a desire to court public favour.

THOUGHTS

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THOUGHTS

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THE late disquisitions on civil and religious liberty, however they may have entertained some, have not been read by others, without a painful apprehension, that some public disturbance would be excited by them. They are in general made up of inflammatory materials, and seem designed, in many of the assertions found in them, to rouse the quiet Public to action. The late tumult at Birmingham has shewn, that these apprehensions were not to be configned to the class of unreasonable fears. Something of this sort was to be expected; though, it may be supposed, there might be some among the authors and abettors of the violent things lately said on the Rights of Men, who neither wished nor apprehended the consequence. Eager in the prosecution of their scheme, they might be hurried on too fast, to consider

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what

what would be the probable effect of their proceedings on the peace of the community. When, however, the flame broke out, it was natural to suppose that the most heedless aggressors would see what they had been doing; that the fact would open their eyes to the mischievous tendency of their behaviour; and that if it had arisen from want of foresight, rather than want of benevolence, they would publicly lament the evil they had unintentionally occasioned.

Amongst the late disturbers of the public mind, there have been no few of those who are called the Ministers of the Gospel of Peace! Surely they, being bound by their office to be examples as well as teachers, if they do not come forward with a retraction of their sentiments, will (instructed by the late commotion) lead the way in deploring the mischief that has arisen from the avowal of them. But, as yet, we hear nothing of this sort from these gentlemen. One of them, "the *Apostle*, if not the High-Priest of his Profession," has written a Letter to his Townsmen in consequence of the event. But in Dr. Priestley's Letter to the inhabitants of Birmingham, there appears nothing of the kind.

The true patriot may, for a while, be mistaken in his views, or hurried away by the warmth of his temper. He may view petty evils through a magnifying medium. His indignation at them, just in its principle, but exorbitant in its degree, may,

may, by its expression, excite others to acts of violence, which, on reflection, he would sooner suffer than occasion. Such a man will dread to appear to the public eye in the hated form of an incendiary; a little sober consideration on the evils that his zeal has caused, will, itself, bring him to a better judgment, and he will recede perhaps in silence. But if he speaks to the sufferers, they will recognize in his penitential confessions, the lover of peace, the lover of order, and the friend of mankind. Not a feature of this character can we discern in the Letter to the inhabitants of Birmingham. There is nothing penitential in it. The Author begins with a wretched attempt to exculpate himself, and to transfer the cause of the mischief from himself to others. An outrage this on the common sense of all those who have read his writings, as a plain remark or two, such as they naturally suggest, shall presently convince my reader. The attempt to exonerate himself is not a greater insult on the understandings of men, than the obstinacy observable in this letter, is on their sense of decency and humanity. Had he been as well taught in the mild spirit of Christianity as he professes to be, there had surely been in this address some expressions of concern for the evils that have happened: especially considering, that, besides what a large and populous town felt in apprehension, this riot will be followed with the sacrifice of many lives on the altar

of Public Justice. Disconsolate women are soon to take their last embrace of their husbands; children, to shriek at the sight of their fathers suspended before their own doors; and heart-broken parents, to follow their sons to the fatal tree; some of whom, had they not been put in motion by the ferment his writings have contributed to raise, had never disturbed the peace of society*. Had there been any sympathy in the heart that dictated a letter on the events that must draw such calamities after them, there had surely been one line expressive of such a sensation. Let the reader find it if he can.

*“ After living with you eleven years, in which
 “ you had uniform experience of my peaceful beha-
 “ viour, in my attention to the quiet duties of my
 “ profession and those of philosophy, I was, &c.”*

Thus the Doctor describes himself. Who but would suppose, had he no other clue to guide him to the knowledge of the writer's life, that this is some venerable pastor who has been living for these same eleven years little more connected with the world, than was necessary in order to evangelize it? Spending the greater part of his time in private meditation on the Scriptures, stu-

* If these ideas are not fully justified by the issue of the late Affizes held at Warwick, the Reader must not conclude, that the Author means to exaggerate. The passage was written before the Trial of the Rioters came on, and was meant to describe such a series of tragical events as probably would happen; and which would naturally occur to a humane mind.

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dying new and more successful methods of affecting mankind with those grand realities of an invisible world, which their present occupations and pleasures are apt to conceal from them; praying for the world, and then leaving his sacred retreat, only to apply the heavenly schemes he had digested in private; still confining himself to the province of a man consecrated to serve at the altar, and, therefore, seen in public merely because a "Man of God" is wanted in the world, to instruct, to admonish, to advise, to console, or to reprove it. Leaving it to secular characters to meddle with the less tranquil pursuits of political theorists, and even in those studious relaxations in which he sometimes indulges, still appearing the Son of Peace, by directing his enquiries to the acquisition or communication of such knowledge as may benefit the Republic of Letters.

Such, it is to be expected, must be that Man who dares appeal to the *experience* of his neighbours for his "*peaceful behaviour in his attention to the quiet studies of a sacred profession and philosophy.*" But Dr. Priestley is no such peaceable man. Let the Reader judge for himself. A moment's reflection merely on the part he has taken in political affairs, will afford a strong presumption, that, at least, he has not confined himself to the quiet studies of these two professions; but that if there are any turbulent studies belonging to them, he has engaged in these likewise, and that he

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might,

might, with the utmost propriety, have appealed, not only to his neighbours, but to the whole nation, that to these he has been peculiarly attentive. The effrontery of that appeal with which his Letter begins, will be still more manifest, by a perusal of the very provoking things he has said in his Letter to Mr. Pitt, and in his answer to Mr. Burke. The general style of all his remarks on the Ecclesiastical Establishment of that Country in which he has long enjoyed repose, and in which he has been honoured, is irritating to the highest degree. Take a sample from the last-mentioned publication. This pacific Divine and Philosopher officiously meddles with the concerns of a Society to which he does not belong: this, though it were done even with mildness and good manners, would be rather deviating from the line of a peaceable man's course; but such is not his method. He speaks as if he meant to exasperate, by comparing what the bulk of the nation naturally consider as worthy of respect, even from its enemies, to destructive vermin. These are his words: (page 83.) "Every article within the
 " compass of the Civil Establishment of Christiani-
 " ty is evidently an innovation; and as systems
 " are reformed by recurring to their first principles,
 " Christianity can never be restored to its pristine
 " state, and recover its real dignity and efficiency,
 " till it be disengaged from all connexion with
 " civil power. This Establishment, therefore,
 " may

“ may be compared to a *fungus*, or a *parasitical*
 “ *plant*, which is so far from being coeval with
 “ the tree on which it has fastened itself, that it
 “ seized upon it in its weak and languid state,
 “ and, if it be not cut off in time, will exhaust all
 “ its juices, and destroy it. So far is a Civil Esta-
 “ blishment from being friendly to Christianity,
 “ that it may be compared to the animal called
 “ the *Sloth*, which, when it gets upon any tree,
 “ will not leave it till it has devoured the leaves
 “ and the bark, so that it presently perishes. Ra-
 “ ther it is the animal called a *Glutton*, which
 “ falling from a tree (in which it generally con-
 “ ceals itself) upon some noble animal, imme-
 “ diately begins to tear it, and suck its blood;
 “ and, if it be not soon shaken off, it infallibly
 “ kills its prey.

“ Now when I see this *fungus* of an *Establish-*
 “ *ment* upon the plant of Christianity, draining
 “ its best juices; when I see this *Sloth* upon its
 “ stately branches, gnawing it, and stripping it
 “ bare; or, to change my comparison, when I
 “ see the *Glutton* upon the shoulders of this noble
 “ animal, the blood flowing down, and its very
 “ vitals in danger; if I wish to preserve the tree,
 “ or the animal, must I not, without delay, ex-
 “ tirpate the Fungus, destroy the Sloth, and kill
 “ the Glutton. Indeed, Sir, say or write what
 “ you please, such vermin deserve no mercy.
 “ You may stand by, and weep for the fate of

“ your favourite Fungus, your Sloth, or Glutton,
 “ but I shall not spare them.”

Thus does the Doctor treat his Countrymen on a subject, which, if not their reason, yet at least their prejudices have led them to reverence. I will not expatiate on the indecency of this passage, nor point out to the reader what must strike him without a prompter, how remote this is from the language of a peaceable man. I will not avail myself of his prejudices in favour of the religious establishment of this country; but will appeal to an unprejudiced understanding for a decision on the justness of the comparisons this writer has employed, in order to calumniate all religious establishments, and especially ours. His inflammatory spirit will be made more evident by shewing the falsehood of this illustration so far as it respects the Church of England, than by a string of exclamations. Is that a Fungus, a Sloth, or a Glutton, that provides every parish in the kingdom with a service (to say nothing of the officiating Ministers, some of whom the most prejudiced must allow to be diligent and exemplary), in which the Holy Scriptures are read; the blessings of Creation, Providence, and Redemption, are acknowledged; and by which a just apprehension of our duty to, and dependance on, God, and our obligations to the Redeemer of the World, is inculcated? In many parts of the country, the people, left to themselves, would not probably be

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at the expence incurred by the public services of religion ; divine worship would in time be discontinued, because it must be paid for, and barbarism would ensue. That there is not a total ignorance of Christianity in some parts of this kingdom, is to be attributed to this, that the Civil Power, unasked, provides the people with the means of information. If this provision for the souls of the people comes short of its designed effect, through the negligence or irreligion of the person deputed to conduct the solemnities of religion, all that we can say in this case is, that the institution is dishonoured : it does not injure the religion, for the propagation of which it was intended ; it robs not the tree of its juices, nor sucks the blood of the animal. If, on the other hand, the post of Minister is occupied by a man heartily devoted to the service of Christianity, what incumbrance is the Establishment to him ? So far from its being in his way, it gives him many advantages. An Officer of the State, he has the Throne at his back ; on his side, the prejudices of education, the habits in which his flock have been practised, and the respect still in some measure paid to the clerical order. The Establishment becomes a most commodious engine in his hands, for the attainment of that end he has so much at heart ; namely, to enlighten, to improve, and to promote the happiness of mankind. This engine, so great in power, and yet so easily wrought, removes so many

difficulties out of his way, that he has perhaps little to interrupt him in the prosecution of his object; save, perhaps, from some busy sectary who divides his flock, destroys the bond of union in his parish, and alienates the hearts of his people not only from his person, but, which gives him much more concern, from a religious constitution which he believes to be one of the greatest blessings of the country. For the removal of such an inconvenience as this, the power of our Church is indeed inadequate, neither do we wish it greater; rather chusing to glory in an Establishment which furnishes the means of Salvation to *all*, without tyrannising over the consciences of *any*.

The injuries sometimes sustained by Christianity itself through the insidious workings of an enemy to the national worship, would tempt one to mark out modern Sectarianism by some Metaphor, not less odious, perhaps, nor less happily applied than those, by which the Philosopher of Birmingham has characterized the religious Establishment of his country: but such a retaliation might hurt the minds of some worthy Separatists, who (while they prefer their own forms of religion to ours) are yet ready to combine with us in any undertaking that has the common cause of Christianity for its object. And if there were not such persons, yet Christianity would not thank me for making a virulent writer my model.

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The services that Churchmen have rendered to Christianity at large, naturally occur to us, upon the Philosopher's bringing his three natural curiosities out of his Cabinet. Does that Institution deserve to be libelled by such abusive comparisons, which has fostered the translations, the expositions, the able defences of Christianity which this country can boast? Is it not from the bosom of the National Church, that those Worthies have proceeded, who have dismantled the Forts of Infidelity; who have enriched the libraries of Europe; whose studies have shortened the labours of modern students; and from whose applications Dissenters themselves reap advantages? advantages which should teach them to treat, at least, with respect, a Family from which they have derived so many literary benefactions.

In short, does the civil establishment of religion in England take away the key of religious knowledge? Does it, while it calls itself by the name of Christ, disfigure and disguise his religion with foreign ceremonies? Lays it any restraints on the spirit of Enquiry? Does it extinguish any new light rising in the country? How does it then exhaust the juices, or suck the blood of Christianity? How then is it "hostile to the clearest truth?" Yet all this has this writer charged it with.—But in the stretch of his prophetic vision he sees the period of illumination. Then, "the people of this country will discover that what
"they

“ they have paid so dearly for as a *benefit*, is really “ a *nuisance*.” Page 128. Thus, from the injustice of the comparisons Dr. Priestley has employed against the Establishment, you may learn somewhat of his reverence for truth and decency ; but especially the peaceableness of his intentions.

To the character of a Philosopher, he has great pretensions : but whatever is allowed him on this claim, serves to detract from him as a peaceable Divine. As a Philosopher he knows something of human nature. He knows, *e. g.* how irritable men are on the subject of their national religion. He therefore knows what strings to touch in order to chafe them ; and in this way has discovered much ability. But if his life had been, indeed, that which his Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham describes it to have been, the pacific Pastor would have regulated the skilful Philosopher. The soft benevolent spirit of the servant of Christ would have interposed, and said, “ light “ comes from Heaven ; but fire from Hell. We “ will illuminate if we can ; but we are forbidden “ to inflame.” He, alas ! has acted under no such influence. As if he meant to rouse the dormant irascibility of the British lion, he goads him in the part, which as a Philosopher, and as a native, he knew to be most sensible. From a sectary who is a character considered by the common people of the nation (who cannot be supposed to enter into the argument of uniformity and toleration),
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rather as indulged in the exercise of his religion, than as having right to it, little could be borne that deviated from a respectful treatment of the religion, to which he chose not to conform. I do not justify this narrowness. I merely mention the fact. A fact to which Dr. Priestley was not ignorant ; and to which, as a friend of peace, he ought so far to have attended, as not to have endangered the safety of the community, by wantonly provoking those, who, when excited to tumult, become as irresistible, as unmanageable, and as indiscriminately destructive, as a tempest. How little of this caution he has observed, the stimulative tone of many of his writings evinces. And to those who have not read them, the sample I have given from his Letters to Mr. Burke is sufficient to shew. Not that I have produced every thing of this sort which that pamphlet alone would furnish. Let the intelligent judge to whom is to be attributed the commotion raised in the minds of the people against that man, who, not being of their own communion, was considered an officious meddler in the concerns of theirs. They found that he was in every part of the kingdom holding up their Church as the bane of Christianity, and as a public *nuisance*—endeavouring to raise the country against it, as to the extermination of wasteful and destructive *vermin*, and pledging himself not to lose any opportunity that may be afforded him of ridding Christianity of it, as its worst enemy.

enemy. Can any man that weighs the import and tendency of such a purpose, so expressed, be at a loss where to fix the origin of the late Riot at Birmingham? However we may think that people should be punished for the mischiefs done by them in their passion, we do not lose sight of the guilt of him, who, without any provocation offered to him or his, first interrupted the quiet of their minds, and threw them into disorder. On the contrary, to him alone, as the aggressor, we naturally impute all the mischief. In that very predicament does the rude and unprovoked attack of this clamorous writer on the civil and religious constitution of his country place him.

But is this indeed the case? If we advert to the state of things previous to the late introduction of the claims of the Dissenters, we shall see that the assertion is just. Certain it is, that, previous to this period, we were all quiet. Wise and good men saw with pleasure the daily silent extinction of those animosities that had formerly existed between the members of the Established Church and the Non-conformists. The prejudices which fed these evil dispositions were hastening to sepulture. In many of those towns where different religious societies resided, this change of things, so grateful to the benign spirit of Christianity, was very conspicuous; not only by friendly associations, by the exchange of visits, by the intercourse of trade, but also by occasional attendance at those
places

places of worship for which our habits of education has given us no predilection. Thus things lately stood; and they were going on to perfection. But we are now relapsing into the old state of religious rancour, as far as the indifferentism of the times will let us. The Dissenters are the cause of this retrograde motion. They have revived old animosities; by their conventions, their sermons, their pamphlets, their political turn, their insolence, and their ridicule. The writers who have distinguished themselves by the use of these arms, have been generally abetted by the whole body of Dissenters. Those who have mixed with them in conversation, have found them almost universally pleased with the illiberal sarcasms which Priestley, Robinson, and others of their more indecent writers, have flung at the Church of England. These writers, as theologists, are not held in the highest reputation by some of the Dissenters themselves. But they are almost forgiven for their heterodoxy by their purer brethren, for the service they have rendered to the common cause of Non-conformity, by their virulence against the Establishment.

The general prejudice against Dissenters being called forth again by the restless and discontented spirit discoverable in their public proceedings, the people became more sensible to any improper freedoms offered to the constitution or religion of their country; and were prepared to receive apprehensions, that something against them was aimed at by these

these men. These apprehensions were encouraged, by the sentiments avowed by the Non-conformists, in their remarks on the French Revolution. As these were new and bold, they of course became the subjects of common conversation. Curiosity would prompt people to read for themselves; especially at Birmingham, where a man that had distinguished himself by such sentiments was an inhabitant. They opened one of his books; and there they found that the man, who had quietly enjoyed the exercise of his religion, threatened the destruction of theirs. The spirit of resentment thus excited, and felt in private, was likely to become augmented and explode somewhere, should any public occasion occur to draw together a considerable number of those who were offended and alarmed. Such an occasion was the commemoration of the French Revolution; which, through the known sentiments of those who principally moved this celebration, was naturally considered as a republican festival, and a prelude to some future blow against the Constitution.

These facts being kept in sight, any considerate and impartial person may answer this question, with whom did the disturbance actually originate? 'Tis you, Meek Divine! Peaceable Philosopher! that did, in fact, set the populace afloat, and bring it down upon a crowded town, like a destructive engine, that threatened general devastation. In vain, therefore, you seek to shift
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off the blame of this event from yourself, by endeavouring to fix it on others; the country considers you as a principal cause of the mischief. And the utmost that candour itself can say in your behalf, is, that perhaps you did not intend the consequences, and are, independent of the losses you have sustained, sincerely sorry that they happened.

It would have looked more like this, however, if any thing like sorrow for the event had appeared in Dr. Priestley's Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham. But, as I have observed, not a vestige of such a feeling is to be found in it. No: instead of any thing penitential on his part, he seeks to criminate the clergy, and others of the neighbourhood, in this affair. He charges them with "leading his Townsmen to consider any injury done to a Dissenter as a meritorious thing, with having excited their bigotry to the highest pitch, with saying every thing to *inflame* their passions, and *preparing them for every species of outrage.*" The charges brought against these Gentlemen are heavy: but for the justness of them, we have only his bare word. For the truth of those exhibited against their accuser in these reflections, I call the whole nation to witness. They can be substantiated by producing the papers of the offender. Not being on the spot by many miles, nor having any communications with the inhabitants of Birmingham, the writer of these

sheets has it not in his power to vindicate those Gentlemen against these allegations. It seems highly probable, however, that Dr. Priestley had no other authority for them than vague reports. But it is unworthy of a Philosopher to believe evil of another upon such uncertain testimony; and still more unworthy of a Christian Teacher, to exhibit a *public* charge on such questionable authority. This hasty procedure has, however, some apology. Such a loss was sustained by Dr. Priestley in this commotion, as would have disturbed a far more angelic mind; a loss that is irreparable! Under such circumstances, how natural was it to believe, and to accuse, without stopping to examine the truth of the reports! I refer to the loss of his Books, and especially his Manuscripts. Here, every lover of science must feel for him. To consign to the flames collections of a life-time; to destroy in one hour the laboured investigations of many years, committed to writing and preserved, perhaps, with no other view, than to leave them, as a legacy of gratitude to that Republic of Letters, in which he had received so many honours; to snatch from him, when hoary in the service of literature, so many hard-earned honours and enjoyments, was enough to throw him into such a paroxysm of vexation, as would hurry him on to discharge accusations and reproaches on the first object that came in his way.

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Under these circumstances the considerate part of the nation may forgive the imputation of the worst crimes, attributed to the Ministers of their religion, in the Doctor's Letter. Had he not been under these circumstances when he wrote that Letter, we might have taken the passage referred to for an effusion of the mean hatred of a malicious Sectary, tortured by the rank the Clergy possess in the Empire, and interested in holding them up to the detestation of the people. Certain it is, that, previous to his having sustained this loss, he seemed to discover a malicious pleasure, in endeavouring to render them contemptible. Whatever they are, they are not Persecutors. A Separatist receives no disturbance from them. As he has no vocation that calls him to inspect their manners, his animadversions on the conduct of a Society with which he has no connection are impertinence. It is notorious, that, numerous as they are, and so much influence as they have, they might render themselves troublesome to the Separatists; and yet their conduct has been marked by the most pacifick treatment of Dissenters. His endeavours, therefore, to lessen them in the opinion of the people, exhibit a striking instance of refractoriness and ingratitude. Their mildness alone entitles them to respect from all the Sectaries. This feature in the character of the Superior Clergy needs not a sun-beam to point it out. If our ecclesiastical Dignitaries are not as

much distinguished for Apostolic Zeal as some of their order in former ages have been, yet in the humane virtues they were never exceeded.

But to have allowed this, and to have acted accordingly, would not have served the great purpose of this reforming knight errant, the overthrow of the National Church. In the prosecution of this object, he all along seems fierce and malignant, and incapable of imitating the mild and gentle manners we recognize in the Established Clergy. Every new exhibition of his character presents a more implacable and unconquerable fierceness of temper. It might be expected that, if any thing could moderate this, the late events of Birmingham would have had such an effect on him. So far from it you find him still continuing the exasperating tone; and manifesting an obstinacy, that at once shocks all our ideas of the Pastoral Character, and refutes all the pretensions of the quiet philosopher. We find him telling the people, scarce recovered as they are from their terrors of a destructive mob let loose by himself, I am the implacable enemy of your religious establishment; and I rejoice to think, that should you remove me, it would not want an enemy, but, that I should be succeeded by those who would be as inveterate against it as I have been. Such in fact is the language of this passage in his Letter to the Inhabitants of Birmingham. "Should you destroy
" myself, as well as my house, library, and appa-
" ratus,

"ratus, *ten more* persons, of equal or superior spirit and ability, would rise up. If those ten were "destroyed, an *hundred more* would appear ; and, "believe me, the Church of England, which "you now think you are supporting, has received "a greater blow by this conduct of yours, than I "and all my friends have ever aimed at it." If this passage is to be taken as a proof of his being "better instructed than we are in the mild and "forbearing spirit of Christianity ;" then it follows that we must be ill-supplied indeed with instructors in this heavenly exercise. Be that as it may : without any instructor in the art, we know that to menace is not to forbear. We are not so ignorant as not to see this difference ; nor so pusillanimous as to be disheartened either by the intelligence he has given of his *corps de reserve*, or by the predictions which this Prophet has here repeated of the doom of our Establishment.

This engine the Doctor expects will produce some effect, as he so frequently works it. He hopes to dispirit, by assuring us, that the Church cannot stand. Let, however, the Prophet fulminate his predictions and prognostications against the Church. We are not so soon dejected. The cry of *Down she goes* will not loosen one of her stones. It is not the great strength of you, Unitarian Dissenters ! that we fear : even though your whole militia should be embodied, and long disciplined in the science of ecclesiastical tactics, You

are not yet of sufficient consequence to give us, on that ground, any apprehension. Nothing but the corrupt departure of her own members from the faith and practice that the Church inculcates can affect her safety. Should her ministers become universally negligent, and her members dissolute, then indeed she will be in danger; and the most contemptible assailants may hope to demolish her fortifications, and plunder her treasures: for her "*defence*" will not continue, when her "*glory is departed.*" Then the Unitarian Dissenters may be employed against the nation as the scourge of God. For in no light more honourable are they to be considered, who, while they punish the *corrupt members* of an orthodox Church, shall be permitted to rase her foundations, and erect on her ruins a *corrupt doctrine*.

Here, therefore, there may be something to fear. But of the pretended consequence of these men, nothing is to be dreaded. The cant of increasing light may mislead some to suppose, that the leaven of their views and dispositions is spreading rapidly, and will soon have diffused itself through the whole national mass. So far from this, the bulk of the people are shocked at the boldness of their demands; and, surprized at their discontents, ask, *What do these people want?* Dr. Priestley would dispirit the friends of the present constitution in Church and State, by announcing the increase of Dissenters of late years. He would
fain

fain make us believe, that every addition made to the Non-conforming body is an augmentation to the enemies of the Church. But let not the Nation blend all who separate from the Church of England with these malcontents. The Quakers, for instance, are to be excepted; so likewise are the Moravians; so likewise are the Methodists*. They are satisfied in having full liberty to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences. They make no complaints. They urge no claims. They do not so much as ask for any thing. They were not found amongst those who lately applied to Parliament, for the repeal of the Test Act; but quietly went on with their duty to God and to Man, while political Dissenters were disturbing the nation.

There is an assertion of Dr. Priestley's concerning the last mentioned description of the religious, in his Letters to Mr. Burke, that requires some explanation. "The Methodists are by no means attached to the Establishment. Few of them ever trouble your churches, and frequently in great bodies become Dissenters." (Page 128.) This is said in conjunction with some compliments paid to this body a few pages before, either to cajole these people (by an affectation of friendship

* The Author has reason to believe, there are other denominations of Christians equally innocent; but he chuses to assert only such things as fact, of which he has certain evidence.

for them) into an adoption of his political views, or to deject the country by consigning this description of men to the class of Malcontents. For it is well known, that they are now so numerous as to make no inconsiderable addition to the weight of whatever scale they are thrown into. Dr. Priestley asserts, that they frequently become Dissenters in great bodies; and he brings this as one of the proofs that the Church is in danger. As if he had said, *make a man a Dissenter, and you have created an enemy to the Established Church.* You are very right, Doctor. The rule is, we believe, general; though we know that it has some exceptions. But it is not always from the most worthy motives that a man becomes a Dissenter. The reasons of the change are not *always* to be found in the best of principles. While the religious Establishment of this country is congenial to that universally allowed character of the British Constitution, a mixed monarchy; the dissenting system in all its parts is highly favourable to democracy. It is a body animated by a democratic soul. The common people must, in the nature of things, be ready to listen to whatever has a tendency to render them of any consequence. Of course, whatever is democratic comes to them with considerable recommendations. Here then we discover *one* of the causes of men's becoming Dissenters. It is not always to be found in a perception, that there exists among the Non-conformists

a more

a more apostolical discipline and worship than elsewhere ; but it may be attributed in many instances to our natural love of independence. While a man continues a member of the Established Church, he is blended with the multitude. He may have wisdom to advise ; but nobody asks his opinion. He may have gifts ; but nobody calls them forth into exercise. In this situation, therefore, he attracts no notice. Bring him into a dissenting Society, and immediately he becomes a man of consequence. He has a vote. He has promineney. He is no longer in the back-ground of the piece ; but is relieved, and brought forward. He feels he is gratified by this change of circumstances ; and is of consequence for ever lost to the Established Church : inasmuch as, to come back to it again, is to go into the shade ; and, from being every man's equal, to become somebody's inferior. He learns to chatter about rights and liberties, and to consider a state of subordination as unfriendly to the happiness of mankind ; because it once laid restraints on his forward temper. It is this love of distinction, and the opportunity of gratifying it in a dissenting communion, that not unfrequently transforms a Methodist into a Dissenter. And then, as Dr. Priestley very well knows, and has in fact confessed, he is enlisted into a corps, from which the Established Church has nothing kind to expect. But till the Methodist is thus transformed into a Dissenter, he does not
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seem to be hostile to the Church. For it is well known that they very frequently go to Church. In many of their places of worship they make use of the Liturgy of the Church of England. Thousands of them, who stately hear their own Preachers, make a point of receiving the Sacrament in the Church belonging to the parish in which they reside. And not a few of them, designing their sons for the Church, have entered them at our Universities.

That whole bodies of the Methodists turn Dissenters, is an assertion not without truth. When such an augmentation to the dissenting body as this is derived from the Methodists, it is through the former's having gained over, by a concurrence of circumstances which I am going to lay before the Reader, some of the more popular Preachers among the latter. The progress which these Religionists have within a few years made, has excited my curiosity, and led me to inform myself of several particulars in their history. The pulpit has never, perhaps, in any age, been more degraded than it has been by the effusions of some of their Preachers. But others of them, besides attending to the decorum of the pulpit, have not wanted that sort of popular eloquence that generally affects an audience. Some of these, previous to their having preached, have applied for holy orders in the Church of England; but on being refused have commenced Methodist Preachers and

and at length become Dissenting Ministers. Of this last order, they, perhaps, never would have become, had they succeeded in their attempts to obtain ordination in the Church of England. Educated within the pale of the Established Church, attached to her Doctrines, Discipline, and Worship, they have earnestly wished to be employed in her service ; and have offered themselves with those testimonials and that share of learning generally required of Candidates for Holy Orders ; but, not having been at an University, or suspected of an intention to adopt the irregularities of the persons they have been found to be connected with, they have been refused. Having, in the pursuit of an admission in the Church, relinquished some secular advantages which they could not recover, and having spent some time in the acquisition of knowledge, they have (whether justly or not I don't enquire) conceived themselves qualified to be the Instructors of Mankind. They cannot succeed in their application for Orders in the Church, yet the world wants reforming. The Door of Methodism is open to them ; and, the liberality of the times having done away some of those prejudices which formerly rendered a transition from one religious community to another a matter of so much difficulty, they enter this door, and become itinerant Preachers. Hopeless, and, perhaps, chagrined by the last repulse, they begin to lose all predilection for the National Church.

Long

Long separated from attendance on its service, their remaining attachments to this form of Christianity gradually wear away. In the course of their labours, one of them has, in some particular spot, attached to himself a few proselytes, who, by a partiality easily accounted for, give this man a preference to all other Preachers, and wish to retain him as their stated Minister. A settlement is proposed. The Preacher accedes. A place of worship is built; and, to secure the people who meet in it from disturbance, it is licensed under the Act of Toleration. Thus, perhaps, a hundred people, educated in the Church of England, become Dissenters at a stroke. Their posterity are such of course. Some of these Candidates for Orders in the Church were, no doubt, improper to be admitted: but there is reason to believe, that others were not; and the refusal of Orders to these men first detached them from the National Church, who, had they not been repulsed, would ever have remained her fast friends, and would, consequently, have been lost to the Dissenters, to whose numbers they now make considerable additions by the warmth of their zeal, the popularity of their talents, and the diligence of their exertions.

By the account here given, the increase of Dissenters is allowed; though not to the degree one would suppose, from the style of Dr. Priestley's report. There is another circumstance that contributes

tributes to the increase of Dissenters, which I shall mention : for I mean to report, as far as I know it, the true state of my Country, and wish I could serve it by more extensive information. The circumstance I am going to mention is not noticed by Dr. Priestley. He who knows so much of this country, cannot be supposed to be ignorant of it. But he is not so generous an Enemy, as to point out such a fault as may be corrected, to the disservice of his own schemes.

The Dissenters owe the increase of their numbers in some of our larger towns, to the not taking care, that the number of our places of worship is proportionate to the number of houses. The increase of inhabitants has rendered the Parish Church too small for the accommodation of the Parishioners. Proposals are made for the building of an additional Church or Chapel of Ease. Subscriptions are ready. But the Incumbent must be applied to : from this man, who, by his office and connections ought to forward the design, sometimes it happens, that the greatest impediments to it proceed, by his insisting on such terms, as cannot be complied with. The scheme, though not relinquished, is postponed to some future season, in which, by a change of circumstances it may become more practicable. The interim affords a fine opening for a religious Enterpriser. A piece of ground among the new buildings is purchased, for the erection of a Meeting-House *. It is built

* This structure is not unfrequently styled a Chapel.

and furnished (that it may have as little of the air of a Conventicle as possible) with an Organ or Band of Singers, with an elegant Pulpit, with a costly Chandelier pendent from the cieling, and with a Preacher of some address and not unfightly to the Ladies and Gentlemen through any want of powder and prunella. In short, there is as much show as the finances of the Adventurer can afford to the frivolity of the age. Thus built and furnished, they are ready to take your money; and it is found to be not an unproductive Enterprize. It is nearer than the Parish Church. Here you may be accommodated with a seat; and there you must stand. These circumstances concurring, perhaps, with the weariness of fruitless negotiations, and some little disgust taken at the Clergy in general, for the unreasonable demands of *one* of their body, whole streets at a time are detached from the Church. The inhabitants either go to no place of worship, or turn Dissenters. In either case, they are lost to the Church of England.

These are the generally operating causes of the increase of Dissenters, and the increase is far from being inconsiderable. To these causes it must be attributed; and not to the invincible arguments of Dr. Priestley, or the boasted spread of that growing light which he is perpetually running from Birmingham to Hackney, and from Hackney to London, to trumpet forth; and which, according to him, is daily lessening the number of
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the *friends* of the Church, by making her *errors* manifest. It proceeds from causes foreign to these things, from something very much within ourselves; and for which we have the means of prevention. But from whatever causes this increase proceeds, it demands our serious attention. A thorough-paced Dissenter is a politician; and his system of politicks is such, as has a tendency to make him deviate from the line of a peaceable subject. Those who become Dissenters from some of the causes abovementioned, are not to be considered as fully initiated. They are Dissenters not through any disaffection to the constitution in Church and State: their Separatism is the creature of accident, or convenience. We will not, however, answer for their posterity; who, it is very likely, will not be such neutral characters in the political world as their fathers. Thus, they who *quietly* dissent from the Church of England now may, in their posterity, transmit to their country an accession to those restless spirits who are evidently hostile to the Established Church. This view of things tempts me to offer a hint to our ecclesiastical Rulers.

It seems to be for the interest of the Church at this time, to take care that she loses *not one* of her pious members. Many of the privately educated candidates for Holy Orders appear to be of this description. They cannot be supposed to be so richly freighted with classic lore as those who
have

have had the advantage of an University education. Yet there are situations in the Church, where they possibly may be of service. Certain it is, that they are zealous for those doctrinal points of the Church of England, against which Dr. Priestley has so distinguished himself. They consider those as the grand features of Christianity, which he calls the corruptions of it. And here they are at issue with him, and his coadjutors. They consider every attempt to demolish her fortifications, as a remote attack on that purity of doctrine, that dwells within them; and they offer themselves as volunteers, in the service of that truth, for the security of which all its bulwarks have been raised. Surely these men are worthy of some attention.

The writer of these remarks is not an advocate for the indiscriminate admission of every zealot, that may apply for Holy Orders. Some of those who offer themselves are altogether ineligible. To admit them to the service of the Church, would be to degrade its sacred functions; to refuse them admission, cannot be attended with any inconvenience. They have not strength enough to raise a party against her, if so disposed. But if any of those who apply for ordination, discover, with a great readiness to serve the Church, abilities which qualify them for those offices in which the parochial Clergy are mostly engaged, it seems not adviseable at this time of day to reject them,

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merely

merely because they have not been educated at an University. If they are found on examination to be literate persons, they may be an useful addition to such of the regularly educated Clergy as are daily refuting the objections of Infidels to a standing Ministry, by their zeal, diligence, and success. If it is thought they may not be capable of *raising* the Church; at least, secure them from going over to those who would *depress* her.

Concerning the other cause of the increase of the Dissenters that has been mentioned, it seems necessary to advise a more vigilant attention in both our Ecclesiastical and Civil Rulers, to the increase of houses in large towns; in order that there may be sufficient provision made for the Souls of the People. The interest of the Church of England at large ought not to lie at the feet of any individual in her service. And let it be remembered, that whenever difficulties are thrown by such a man in the way of those who are ready to assist in increasing the means of Religion without strengthening the hands of Separatists, there is a way of bringing that unworthy servant of the Church to reasonable terms.

I have perhaps gone out of my way, in giving the advice here offered to our Superiors; but being desirous to lay before the Public the true causes of that increase of the Dissenters, of which Dr. Priestley is so glad to avail himself, for the animating of his own adherents, and dejecting of
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others, I was naturally led also to observe, that the means of prevention are pretty much in our own hands; hoping, at the same time, that the hint may not be thrown away on those to whom it is directed. As one who considers the entire preservation of the Church of England to be interwoven with that of the Constitution, and the religious Establishment as a blessing to the nation, I have written; and not, God knows, as an enemy to any civil or religious liberty that may be granted without risking the peace and safety of the State. And in these sentiments, I know I am joined by many of those, whose names are not posted up among those fractious mal-contents, who assume to themselves the exclusive honour of being advocates for the rights of men.

There is an insinuation which these gentlemen are very industrious in disseminating, *viz.* That all who do not think with them are enemies to liberty. They, forsooth, are the only friends to mankind; and he who cannot adopt all their ideas, is hurt and pained at any thing that contributes to the happiness of the species. They who are not all admiration and transport at the French Revolution, are, in their account, gruelled at it, as an event favourable to liberty. But who is there that does not rejoice in the abolition of whatever was tyrannical in the old Constitution of France? Stop here, and all is well. But here, these noisy panegyrist of that Revolution will not
5 stop.

stop. This is not enough to rejoice in. The subversion of every thing, of good and bad alike, in the former government, seems to give them the greatest pleasure. But all are not of that mind. There are many who see much that is too wild and extravagant to be either admired or imitated. They cannot fall down and worship the rising sun of French liberty ; not because they are incapable of being warmed with the beams of freedom, but because, however the inconsiderate may exult in the splendour of this object, they notice, amidst all the lustre it throws around the horizon, certain indications of a destructive storm. But be that as it may, we cannot, whether there be such indications or not, adopt an *untried* thing as our model. We cannot easily be persuaded to plunge head and ears after the eccentric Frenchman into the Gulph of Innovation. Our present circumstances are not so wretched and desperate, as to induce us to leap before we look. Nay, we in general think that there are no evils existing in our present condition, that would either justify a Revolution, or that a Revolution would remedy. The people of this country do not think that their Constitution is perfect ; but they feel that it is admirable. They are not averse to improvement ; nor afraid to attempt it ; nor too proud to learn something from that nation, whom we lately esteemed ourselves qualified to instruct. The fact is, we are not yet convinced that the scholars have shot beyond their

masters. We are averse to the licentiousness of experiment. It is the fear of fanaticism in reformation which alone deters us.

The violent panegyrists of the French Revolution have connected, with their admiration of that event, expressions that manifest an alarming dissatisfaction with the present state of things in this country. They have abetted every book calculated to engender murmurs and discontents among the people. Even that farrago of spite, insolence, and treason, written by an American Incendiary, has received their *imprimatur*. This circumstance is sufficient to shew their character. In this circumstance alone we recognize the features of Faction : and it will serve for a key to their designs. They are not inspired by a virtuous love of liberty, but mean to spread disaffection among the people. There is another circumstance that almost amounts to a proof of this ; viz. Their almost total silence on the subject of the Polish Revolution. Why not panegyryze ? Why not celebrate this event ? It is an event not suited to the taste of enthusiastic levellers. It has not enough of the *haut gout* of Republicanism in it. There is too much virtue, temper, order, and happiness in it. It is not so convenient a fact for the purpose of disaffecting the people. This is their aim. Hence their insinuations, that we are in danger from an Aristocratic Tyranny ; an insinuation with which they work, in order to drive us to this conclusion,

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“we ought to do as France has done, extinguish
 “this order of Citizens.” But, Britons! dwell
 for a moment on your circumstances, and say, Is
 there any such thing in existence here as an Ari-
 stocratic Tyranny? What inconvenience have you
 ever found from an Earl, a Marquis, or a Duke,
 which you would not have suffered from a Com-
 moner equally rich? What privilege have the
 Nobility of this Kingdom deprived you of? Of
 what enjoyment have they robbed you? What
 partiality are you able to shew has been shewn to
 them in the Administration of justice? While
 pretended Patriots have been endeavouring to
 persuade you, that the Common People have all
 the inconveniencies of Government, and Noble-
 men all the enjoyments of it, you have seen one of
 their order standing at the bar of the Old Bailey,
 to be tried for an offence alledged against him by
 a Plebeian. It is no longer ago than January 17,
 1791, that Public Justice brought Lord D——
 before her tribunal, on the charge of one of the
 lowest of the plebeian order, a common prostitute.
 This is a striking fact; and by the recency of its
 occurrence, a fortunate one. But had we not the
 good fortune to have such a fact wherewith to con-
 front the insinuations of discontented writers, it
 would have been no difficult question to answer,
 “Is public justice equally administered?” It is.
 Every man, be his rank or his religious sentiments
 what they may, is in this matter equal. The
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County of Warwick will soon feel the truth of this assertion, when it shall be called upon, to make up the losses which the sufferers have sustained in the late Riot at Birmingham. While, therefore, Britons! your love of freedom and your humanity leads you to rejoice in the demolition of Despotism, and the emancipation of thirty millions of people, be thankful that you had no Bastile to raze; no tool of Despotism to sacrifice on the altar of Liberty; no fetters, fastened on either the body or mind of a peaceful subject, to burst. Be thankful, I say, for your privileges; and let this thankfulness speak for itself in your peaceable behaviour, and in shewing that you are proof against all the attempts that are made to excite you.

The existence of some of the evils, on which the democratic party expatiate, is not denied. But allowing the reality, and even magnitude of the evils of which they complain, on examination they are found to arise from the want of moral principle in the agents, rather than from any material defect in the constitution. They are to be classed among the effects of the general corruption of manners; and till better men are found new measures will do nothing. This is most earnestly to be wished: for, till there is a greater spread of moral principle, we may change, abolish, arrange, and new-model; but amidst all this effervescence of state-pharmacy no medicine will be found for the disorders of government. The master-evil will

will still exist; though not in its ancient form. The spirit of venality and corruption will only inform new bodies.

There is one fact which the discontented party have the address to handle in their attempts to unsettle the minds of the people. Unable to shew any oppressions of Noblemen or Churchmen, unable to refer to any corruption of justice, or shew that the little are trampled on by the great, they avail themselves of the dearness of the necessities of life (a thing which the poor now most sensibly feel), in order to increase the public discontents. They would make them believe, that those miseries under which they groan arise from the tyranny of their governors. The present condition of the poor is truly affecting; and the writer of these sheets feels himself unhappy, that he is not able to offer any thing to the Public that would be likely to lessen their miseries. Let them, however, be assured by one who commiserates their case, that it is not the tyranny of their governors, but the wealth and luxury of their country, that makes their condition so hard. Of the taxes laid on by the legislature the poor man pays hardly any. None of the articles necessary to the nourishment of his body are taxed, except his beer. It is the great price of provisions that presses him. Almost all his earnings are expended in food. He has scarcely any thing to spare for the purchase of cloathing; but if he had, he would
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find nothing taxed but his shoes and his hat. He is the most incapable of all the community of supporting the expences of government; and, therefore, hardly any of the incumbrance is laid on him. Far from bearing the burthen of supporting Government, he himself contributes to make the subsistence of others difficult; the Poors-rate being the most enormous of all burthens that can be called Taxation. But he may ask, "Who makes "my provisions so dear?" Not your Governors. It is the number of horses kept in this kingdom; a number so great, as to be said to consume one-third of the produce of the country. It is the vast occupation of land appropriated to the feeding of Cows, which are kept to answer the prodigious demands for butter, &c. These are some of the things that occasion their distresses*. Those men, therefore, are not to be believed, who lay the miseries of the poor at the door of our Governors. We meet with several of these gentlemen, loudly complaining of the distresses of the poor, and on that subject criminating the Rulers. Yet what do they, thus prompt in the talent of accusation, do

* The condition of the labouring poor is now become so very distressing, that, it is to be hoped, something will be attempted by the Legislature for their relief. It is well known that, while the price of provisions has risen within these fifty years one half, the price of labour has not risen above one third. This statement, which is well known to be true, calls loudly on the humanity of the nation to attempt something in the behalf of the most numerous and useful class of its subjects.

to lighten the burthens they affect to lament? Let them shew the objects of their pretended commiseration that they feel for them, by doing what they can to better their condition. Several of them are able, and some of them by the fortunes they have made by the labours of the poor, to diffuse comfort around their habitations. But of this we hear nothing. Poor Gentlemen! they have not time for this. They are so busy in writing against the Great, that they want leisure to do any thing for the Little. “Were *they* in “power indeed, there should be no complaining “in our streets.” But what great thing have they done to lay a foundation for supposing that, had they the power of our rulers, they would manage better, either for the poor, or any other part of the community? Is there any great edifice of their patriotism or liberality standing? The Printers and Paper-makers seem to be the only persons who have reaped any essential benefit from their zeal for the public good. Their pamphleteering, it must be confessed, has employed a multitude.

To them who are capable of that Christian pleasure that is felt in tracing the features of genuine religion in societies with which we have no connection, it would have been no small gratification to have seen that querulous spirit, which has been manifest in some of the late Disquisitions on the Rights of Men, confined either to characters avowedly secular, or to such of the Dissenters as had, long before the

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present

present political ferment, rendered their religion very questionable, by the bold freedoms they had taken with some of the great points of the Christian Faith. But, alas! the spirit of discontent has infected a branch of the Dissenters, from whom something more worthy of the purity of their doctrinal sentiments, and more correspondent to that primitive piety that has been professed among them, might have been expected. How much is it to be lamented, that the more serious Non-conformists should so far forget themselves, as to join almost universally with the Socinian Dissenters in their Democratic murmurings! Considering the high tone and the discontented spirit with which the application for the repeal of the Test Act was conducted, a well-wisher to these men would have rejoiced if but *one* of their congregations had come forward with such a protest as this :

“ Forasmuch as the Dissenters of this Kingdom have been invited to unite in the present application to Parliament for a repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, as unjust, tyrannical, and oppressive ; we, whose names are underwritten (though we should rejoice in seeing every barrier thrown down that at present separates Christians of different communions), cannot allow ourselves to call that unjust, oppressive, and tyrannical, which leaves us at full liberty to follow the dic-

tates of our consciences. Contented with a liberty to serve God in that way which we deem most acceptable to him, and grateful to that Government which not only gives us no disturbance, but protects us equally with all other subjects of the realm, we here enter our protest against the measures of those Dissenters who are now applying to Parliament; inasmuch as we are rather willing to forego any possible advantages that may arise to us from a repeal of the abovementioned statutes, than sanction by our concurrence that violent and discontented spirit manifested by our brethren on this occasion."

Had a protest of this stamp appeared in those public prints that were frequently filled with long strings of resolutions, forged in the various conventions of the Petitioning Dissenters, it would have saved them from the imputation of being *universally* infected with the spirit of discontent; there would have been less reason for an opinion that some, not sufficiently informed, have entertained, *viz.* that there is not a peaceable Dissenter in the kingdom; an opinion, I am persuaded, too hastily adopted, but not refuted by the public act of any among them.

As for the carrying of the repeal of these acts, I believe there is a growing liberality in the age, that would soon have made it an easy acquisition.

There were few but would have readily allowed the request of the Petitioners, had there not been an uncertainty in their minds, whether or not (all things considered) it would not be more for the public peace, to let things stand as they were. The Applicationists, however, soon settled the opinion of the wavering. They moved the nation. They rather demanded, than solicited. They shewed that politic designs were interwoven with their religious claims. They shewed of what sort their political sentiments were—that they were evidently hostile to the Constitution in Church and State. And their eagerness, their confidence, their assurance, and their politics, were the bane of the attempt. Whether they will now carry their point at all is questionable. They have at least prevented the success of their scheme for some years to come.

Let the more evangelical Dissenters, who have been unfortunately involved in a business that has sunk the whole Dissenting body in the opinion of the nation, learn to profit by the failure of this attempt; by turning their attention to the removal of evils that are existing among them of a far more serious nature than any civil inconveniencies that they may suffer from the constitution of their country. Let them suffer a man, who, whatever his opinion may be of the propriety of the Test Laws, would rejoice to see genuine religion in all Christian societies, to impart a few observations

and admonitions to them, to which he apprehends they will do well to listen.

There are people in this country, who, though they do not admire your religious constitution, feel interested for your welfare ; and they see you declining in that which once rendered you respectable. You are daily losing the best part of the character of your forefathers. The grand distinguishing Doctrines of Revelation were dear to them. They were exemplary for the religious order they maintained in their families—for their abstraction from such amusements as vitiate the mind. Their attention was to the religion of the heart. But what a falling-off in these things is there visible among their successors ! One prominent feature of your declension is, that spirit of Scepticism which is gaining ground on you. Scepticism is the disease of speculation. You have fallen into a sad neglect of the plainer parts of Christianity, and of the cultivation of the internal virtues. Your attention has been too much occupied in discussion. This has generated a disputatious turn of mind : but this is not one of your felicities. For while you have been, as you think, purging yourselves only from some of the indefensible tenets of your ancestors, you have insensibly slipped into the habit of doubting of every thing that distinguishes Christianity from Natural Religion, and constitutes its glorious superiority over all other systems.

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This *morbus disputandi* has driven you out into the field of political controversy; and, by throwing more of the business of investigation into your hands, has only led you wider and wider from the beneficial employment of a soul, which is to act as a candidate for immortality. You think yourselves more wise: but you feel not yourselves more happy. This speculative turn has eaten away much of that credit and comfort of Christianity, that once existed in your community; and has now left you more of the political, than of the religious character. It threatens also to reduce you to a mere faction in the commonwealth; and to render your forms of religion, what the Dissenters have said ours is, a political engine. Such they will be, when your meetings together for religious worship shall be little more than a contrivance for collecting and combining the scattered atoms of Republicanism.

It is in your political turn that we are to look for the cause of your unnatural connection with Socinian Dissenters. An attempt is made to strengthen the Dissenting interest, by a junction of all the variegated tribes of separatists. You have acceded to the scheme; not objecting to associate yourselves with those, who in your account are of the most heretical stamp. The junction has been formed; and, "as evil communications corrupt good manners," the infection of heresy has caught

caught some of your members; and threatens to contaminate your whole body.

If there is any thing more dear to you than civil privileges, if the pure doctrines and genuine godliness of Christianity are objects of greater importance to you than the rendering your sons eligible to lucrative offices, separate from a set of men, whose aim, amongst other things, is to occupy all the great posts of instruction; that from those situations, so advantageous to their views, they may exterminate genuine Christianity.

These men have no respect for you. Nor in all probability would they shew you any, were it not that for the present they have something for you to do. They would have you serve under them. But there is something more necessary to your own credit; the happiness of your offspring, and the good of the publick, are far worthier of your attention than any employments which they are disposed to find for you. Seek to recover what the disease of investigation has deprived you of. Attend more than you do to the religion of the heart. Seek not merely to possess well-informed minds; but endeavour also to cultivate that devotedness to God, that gratitude to the Redeemer, that superiority to the world, that abhorrence of pride, selfishness, and obstinacy, that love to God and man, that love of peace, that relish for the duties of public and private devotion, in the exercise of which much more substantial enjoyment is

to be found than in the most enlarged or accurate of those views, which you now contemplate with so much pleasure as the fruit of your speculations. Your children likewise will find you many rational and dignified employments. Instead of infusing into them the spirit of minute objection, as if to litigate was one of the noblest privileges of human nature, endeavour to give them a liberal, candid, and charitable way of thinking, and to make them believe that peace is preferable to victory. Inculcate on them piety to God, reverence for the Holy Scriptures, catholicism towards all denominations of Christians, gratitude to that Government under which they may live peaceably if they please, and loyalty to the best of Princes. Snatch from their hands those infamous publications, which, by witty and ludicrous associations, are intended to lessen that veneration that is due to One, who is no tyrant, debauchee, or oppressor. Train them to the love of order, and of peace; and do not give them reason to suppose, that to be refractory is to be free. What have all your enquiries produced if you have not learnt, that to transmit to the succeeding age good subjects, good neighbours, and eminent Christians, ought to be the first and constant care of a parent?

Be more exemplary in your conduct to that Church you hold so corrupt. And let them not see you separating from the members of it out of
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a professed regard to the purity of Christianity, and yet as avaricious, as dissipated, as ambitious, as much, in every sense of the word, Men of the World, as they are accused of being. In short, seek to deserve the character of the Salt of the Earth. If it mortifies you that you are the "Tail" of the Nation, this is the way to become the "Head." By diffusing a spirit of seriousness around you, you may save the community from putrefaction. *Men* will grow better; and *things* will reform of course. It would be worthy of you, as a religious body, to be at this time occupied in mourning over the profligacy of the age—in weighing moral evils; and seeking to remove them. As for the improvement of the Constitution, leave that to other hands. There are none of its laws that either embitter your life, or restrain the free exercise of your religion. It is your own fault if you are not happy under such a Constitution. That it will admit of improvement may be allowed: but do not you attempt it. The House is commodious; and you may live comfortably in it. We'll allow (for argument's sake) that it is not so compleat as if it was all built anew, after the best model. We'll allow that its present state is the effect of accidental and occasional improvement; and that, therefore, some parts are yet both unsightly and inconvenient. But since, on the whole, it is commodious and comfortable, why should you, if it were in your power, run

the hazard of taking it down? For a hazard it must be to the greatest genius in state-architecture—to one that best understands the organization of Civil Society. It is dangerous meddling with structures, the parts of which are mutually dependant, since the removal of one may be attended with the demolition of the whole. Unpractised as you are in these things, ten to one but where you attempt only to move a small stone, a ton may follow, and bury you in its fall. Besides, should you escape unhurt by the downfall of the building, you may not be so much as consulted in the re-edification. The new structure may be raised by other hands; and re-built in such a way, as to give you reason to lament that you were not satisfied with the former. It is not a safe time to venture upon the change. The strength of Infidelity is great. Were the avowed Despisers of Christianity to have the new modeling of the Constitution, you think that, though they would not be of your religion, they would leave you to the free exercise of it. Let it be granted that they would not persecute the persons of Christians; they might yet be the demolishers of all religion. One thing very injurious to religion is to be apprehended from their having the rule; the Sabbath probably would be no longer a day of rest, Public Authority no longer forbidding the exercise of trade on that day, or enjoining a certain Order of men to administer the solemnities of Divine
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Worship; business, or pleasure, would blot out that mark of regard to a God, now existing among us. And although you and others would still appropriate the day to sacred exercises, scarcely any thing like the numbers that now attend Divine Worship would then join you. And still greater ignorance and profligacy than now obtains would be the consequence. Preachers might still occupy the Pulpit; but they would hardly have any to hear them.

If you are not to be dissuaded from political meddling by the consideration of the hazards you yourselves run by it, be persuaded, as professed Followers of Christ, not to be public disturbers. If you deserve the character of real Christians, a character to which many of the members of your Communion have the clearest title, you ought to be shocked at the thought of doing any thing that should eventually lead to those distresses, confusions, and horrors, which have afflicted other countries, and from which Heaven has hitherto graciously preserved us. And if such a thought shocks you, there will be now a change in your conduct. You will return to the quiet prosecution of your proper callings. You will sit down, peaceful and contented, to the thankful exercise of your religious liberties. For you cannot now think that there is no disturbing tendency in the part you have taken respecting the politics of this country. The commotion at Birmingham shews you that
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your political animadversions did not act merely on the understandings of men ; but that they took hold of their passions, and thereby have disturbed the tranquillity of the country. It is not too late for the Dissenters to recover the character of peaceable Citizens, which they have lost by their late political interference. It was thought that many of them sinned against the peace of the public through inadvertency ; and that they only wanted some instructive fact to convince them of the tendency of what they were about, and to incline them to shew themselves the harmless professors of a peaceful religion. Such a fact has happened ; and the nation is waiting to see what effect it will have on them. If it is such, as to shew they have erred through want of consideration, an act of oblivion is ready to be passed on all their former misconduct : but, if the same restless and turbulent spirit is still seen working among them, farewell candour, forbearance, and concord ! There will be an extinction of all the charities that Christianity inculcates between the different persuasions ; and hostilities will commence, that will probably never end, till one has effected the destruction of the other.

F I N I S.

